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ABSTRACT

Five questions that can aid teachers in making an assessment of the role of English in vocational education programs and in examining attitudes prior to attempting to answer these questions include: (1) Should state certification boards require that teachers of English in vocational education programs have specialized training? (2) Should high schools and area vocational schools offer a course in English designed especially for vocational education students? (3) Should graduate programs in English offer degree programs aimed at training candidates to teach English to prospective teachers of English in vocational education programs? (4) Should vocational education programs in English be designed to insure that offerings go beyond the training required by the nature of the student's employment? and (5) Should literature be a part of English programs designed for vocational training on the high school level? An examination of these questions may lead, not necessarily to agreement on all points, but to a unity of purpose and an exhibition of good will toward the role of English in vocational education programs. (HOD)

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English in Vocational Education Programs: Vocational Education Programs in English

by Donald Eidson

These are times for assessment in our discipline. Professor Maynard Mack in the Presidential address to the Modern Language Association said: "For what is very clear in December 1970 is that we who teach the oncoming generations have arrived at some sort of watershed beyond which the familiar landmarks look different, or even begin to fade away."[1] On my desk I have a notice that Professor Edmund J. Farrell, Assistant Executive Secretary to the National Council of Teachers of English, has just published a report entitled Deciding the Future: A Forecast of Responsibilities of Secondary Teachers in English, 1970-2000 A. D., a book I hope to read before the date of the presentation of this paper. Others who have written recently, such as William W. West[2] and Bruce Robinson,[3] are representative of those who have asked in The English Journal and College English questions which point to specific areas of consideration in these times of taking stock. I, too, should like to ask some questions at the outset--questions that I do not propose to answer during the course of this presentation. Perhaps the questions will aid us in making an assessment of the role of English in vocational education programs and in examining our attitudes prior to attempting to answer these

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questions.

1. Should state certification boards require that teachers of English in vocational education programs have specialized training? If so,

a. should a course in the teaching of English in vocational education programs be a requirement for teacher certification in English on the secondary school level? If not,

b. should college English departments at least offer a course in the teaching of English in vocational education programs?

2. Should high schools and area vocational schools offer a course in English designed especially for vocational education students?

3. Should graduate programs in English offer degree programs aimed at training candidates to teach English to prospective teachers of English in vocational education programs?

4. Should vocational education programs in English be designed to insure that offerings go beyond the training required by the nature of the student's employment?

5. Should literature be a part of English programs designed for vocational training on the high school level? On the college level?

I do not believe that secondary school teachers are as uninformed on the subject of English in vocational education programs as college teachers are, and I believe that their attitudes towards teaching English in untraditional settings are therefore more responsive. Many college teachers with whom I have talked concerning the subject of English in technical training programs or vocational programs are not, however, so well informed. In fact, many

exhibit only polite interest about an area of English which they consider to be on the periphery of our discipline. Many do point to their technical writing courses, listed with freshman composition and remedial reading as "service" courses, as evidence of the discipline's concern with vocational education. It is possible that many of us in English have not digested the daily diet of evidence which reveals that our complicated educational process is shifting and changing to meet the demand for vocational training. We have seen the redefining, growth and success of the technical high school and the establishing of area vocational schools. We have seen technical training schools and two-year community colleges with a strong emphasis on vocational training appearing on every hand. We see, but we do not see. I do not say these things to suggest to you that many teachers of English are going about their business doing the wrong things: what most of them are doing is very right indeed.

If, however, Mr. John Feirer's predictions in the February, 1971, issue of Industrial Arts and Vocational Education[4] prove fairly accurate, we teachers of English at all levels had better, like the drowsy horse that hears the cornbin open, prick our ears. Feirer points out that in the next decade the number of professional and technical workers will increase by half. In these next ten years, according to Feirer, eighty per cent or more of all jobs will require fewer than four years of college, and half or more of the total work force will be in service jobs; the demand will be great for such manpower as computer operators, engineers, medical specialists, and industrial education

teachers. If, as I said earlier, most of us are doing what is right, what are we doing wrong. Almost everyone knows, including Ogden Nash and the Bachelor of Arts, that sin is divided into two parts. At least part of what we are doing wrong is not doing.

In considering the questions asked at the outset, we may often discover that unnecessary and unrealistic divisions appear, with some of us falling into the latter-day camp of Macaulay and Huxley and others of us, the majority it seems quite clear, into the camp of Arnold and Newman. These divisions are not necessary, and our considerations here need not enter into the two cultures controversy. But the attitudes which have contributed to the situation described by editors of a scientific reader are of concern to us. The editors write:

> Illiteracy in science presents its most alarming aspect as it prevails among otherwise educated members of our society. It promotes the antirational, illiberal mood presently [in 1948] in our culture. It has resulted in the almost complete estrangement of arts and letters from the sciences, which explains why our humanists largely miss the insights that science now offers into so many of their habitual concerns. Among engineers and scientists, all too often ignorant in fields outside their own, it has promoted a sterile insularity that shirks the cultural and social responsibilities of their profession.[5]

As I said, my purpose for including the above quotation is not to get involved in a scientific-humanistic debate, but to examine attitudes which may be more clearly outlined according to our response to the quotation.

Invariably one runs into studied disregard and oversimplification when discussing with certain colleagues the place of English in vocational education programs. Many who are caught in the context of doing important things sometimes fail to see that there are other important things, things not outside the realm of their responsibility. Many passively resist the introduction of English into an area of study which they think might damage long-held conceptions of the role of the discipline. These generalizations remind me of another instance where concerned people had to make decisions about the direction their thinking would take, debating whether one course would lead to the advancement of learning or not: Basil Willey[6] talks of a professor at the University of Padua who, after being confronted with the evidence of Galileo's discovery and offered a chance to look through the magic optic glass, refused.

A typical immediate response to this account (and I have tested the story on students and colleagues) is a smile, followed by a knowing comment about the insular nature of college professors. But Willey cautions us not to dismiss too lightly this professor's response to evidence, right enough to be sure, that would destroy a world picture and a system of values. To the teacher at Padua the transcendent values of dying scholasticism were considered to be more important than the immediate demands of scientific evidence. Of

course, the world had to get on about its business and a goodly number of people did look through the telescope and things have been different ever since. The point to be made here, I suppose, is that we can respond to the needs of an increasingly complex technological society without denying what we have long considered to be the purpose of English in the curriculum. We might agree with Sydney Bolt who, in an article published only eight months ago,[7] states that English teachers who understand the reach of their subject will not consent to be confined to a strict program of "Vocational English." Bolt continues:

> This narrow concept of vocational English is that a student should be taught--or rather trained in--those special uses of English required for the nature of his employment. For example, no student whose only use for language on the job is oral should pay attention to writing, and, as far as writing goes, secretaries, for example, need only to learn how to write business letters, engineers to write reports, and so on. Against this, the English teacher rightly protests . . . .[8]

The English teacher might rightly protest, but Bolt notes:

> His right to protest such a narrow syllabus does not, however, give him the right simply to plough his own furrow, irrespective of the felt needs of his students, and if he insists on pursuing his own unique, inimitable

way, in the event he disables himself as a teacher.[9]

In discussions of the role of English in the vocational programs of secondary school curricula, one encounters oversimplification in the form of the either/or fallacy. Often the only alternatives within the high school curriculum for English courses are a clear-cut college preparatory course or track and a well-defined technical course or track. Now there may be very good reasons to have these separate English courses (whatever they may be called), but there is no reason to assume that a distinction between vocational and college preparatory courses in English precludes the possibility of teaching certain things under either of the two approaches. I believe that the results of this particular oversimplification are more damaging to the students in vocational English than to those in college preparatory English because vocational English is usually part of a terminal program (it should not be). Our obligation, many think, is not simply to devise curricula which fulfill the immediate demands of an increase in numbers of those who are seeking training in vocational programs.

I would like to illustrate the above discussion by referring to an article by Ronald G. Loewe entitled, "Industrial Communications: An Approach to Integrating Industrial Arts and English."[10] In the article Mr. Loewe presents a well-wrought outline for a course in "Industrial Communications," including such entries as "The Memorandum," "Inspection Reports," "Supplementary Business Forms," and "Business Letters." I believe Mr. Loewe has a good course outline. He includes most of the material one usually finds in techni-

cal writing handbooks. But if this outline is to do for all the training in English the student in vocational education is to receive, I think he too narrowly defines the word "integration." To integrate vocational studies and English in a course outline, should not there be included entries of the stuff dreams are made on, of that which tends towards, as NCTE President Robert A. Bennett observes, the "liberation of the human spirit to dream, to imagine, to discover"?[11] We need to reunite the knowledge of the fact with the feel of the fact, as Maynard Mack says: we need to see feelingly and to teach others to see feelingly.[12] And we must be practical. Certification requirements, curriculum development, course outlines, committee meetings--we must translate our dreams through these channels into something for this world. The following quotation serves well to point to the need for planning new courses, but it also serves to point up the need for us to examine the role of English and our attitudes before we start that planning:

> Last year, I was asked to teach a senior English course oriented towards industrial arts students, but no one knew exactly what the objectives were or what material should be covered. To further compound my consternation, my principal suggested I stay away from such frightening areas as literature, poetry and grammar, since these, more than likely, were responsible for creating the new course. At first I thought these areas should be included, but the requirements made less demanding. I held this position

> until I realized my error. Not only did it label the students as under-achievers, but the results could be nothing more than anemic if the material is diluted at the outset.[13]

The problems explicit and implicit in this quotation and our attempting to deal with them could and should occupy us for many days. Much is to be done when we return to our desks and classrooms.

I believe that our considerations of role of English in vocational education programs are vital and that such information as I quoted earlier from Feirer (concerning the increase in those who must be trained in this area) adds a note of urgency. I trust the unanswered questions point to certain areas that many feel need consideration. We have looked at certain attitudes one encounters in discussing this topic. I trust, finally, that for us such examination will lead, not necessarily to agreement on all points, but to unity of purpose and an exhibition of good will.

Notes

[1]"To See It Feelingly," PMLA, LXXXVI (May, 1971), 363.

[2]"English Literature for the Disadvantaged--Here's How--But Why?" The English Journal, LX (October, 1971), 902-905.

[3]"Is Literacy All We Want Out of University Higher Education?" College English, XXXI (April, 1970), 643-665.

[4]"Relevancy and Occupational Education," Industrial Arts and Vocational Education, LX (February, 1971), 19.

[5]Scientific American Reader (New York, 1953), p. x.

[6]Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1934), pp. 29-30.

[7]"English in Further Education," Trends in Education, XXII (April, 1971), 34-49.

[8]Ibid., p. 34.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Industrial Arts and Vocational Education, LIX (January, 1970), 27.

[11]"NCTE: 1971. A force in American Education," College English, XXXII (March, 1971), 688-690.

[12]See note 1 above.

[13]Loewe, p. 27.